

October 12, 1956

THE NATURE AND ROLE OF COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL FRONT ORGANIZATIONSI. BACKGROUND

The use of mass organizations in the Communist movement is as old as Communist history itself. In 1920, Lenin, attacking Trotsky's conception of the role of trade unions, stated:

"It is impossible to effect the dictatorship /of the proletariat/ without having a number of 'transmission belts' from the vanguard /the Communist party/ to the masses of the advanced class /the proletariat/, and from the latter to the masses of toilers."

Why is this so? It is because "...The trade unions establish connection between the vanguard and the masses, the trade unions by their daily work convince the masses, the masses of the class which alone is capable of carrying us from capitalism to Communism."

Thus, as early as 1920 the familiar notion of the specialized organization as a "transmission belt" from the party to the masses appeared in Communist tactics.

Elaborating on Lenin, Stalin pointed out in 1924 that the proletariat has a number of organizations aside from the Communist party "...without which it cannot properly wage the struggle against capital: trade unions, co-operative societies, factory and work organizations, parliamentary groups, non-Party women's associations, the press, cultural and educational organizations, youth leagues, revolutionary fighting organizations (in times of open revolutionary action), Soviets of deputies as the form of state organization (if the proletariat is in power), etc."

By virtue of its special qualifications, Stalin continued, the Communist party is "...the only organization capable of centralizing the leadership of the struggle of the proletariat, thus transforming each and every non-Party organization of the working class into an auxiliary body and transmission belt linking the Party with the /working/class."

~~REMOVED OFFICIAL COPY~~

~~RESTRICTED OFFICIALS ONLY~~

- 2 -

"Why," Stalin asked himself subsequently, "are these 'transmission belts' or 'levers' in the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat necessary?" In characteristic fashion Stalin answered his own question as follows:

"The proletariat needs these transmission belts, these levers, and this directing force, because without them it would be, in its struggle for victory, a weaponless army in the face of organized and armed capital. The proletariat needs these organizations because without them it would suffer inevitable defeat in its fight for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, in its fight for the consolidation of its own power, in its fight for the building of Socialism. The systematic help of these organizations and the directing force of the vanguard are needed because without them a dictatorship of the proletariat to any extent durable and firm is impossible."

It seems clear from the above that Lenin and Stalin were primarily concerned with the role of mass organizations after the seizure of power, and after the seizure of power in Russia at that.

It does not, however, strain the imagination to project this type of organization into a situation where the Communist parties are out of power. A mass organization that did its job well prior to the seizure of power would be a valuable auxiliary to the Communist party in its consolidation of power. Yet some distinction must be made between the mass organization, such as a youth organization directly affiliated to the party, and the camouflaged front organization, making its appeal to the non-Communist sympathizer. The former was regarded as an instrument of control, an agent for effecting party decisions. This type of mass organization is a step removed -- and a big step, at that -- from the front organization that is concerned largely with propaganda. This distinction is particularly necessary for an understanding of the role of the international front organization.

It was left to the Comintern and, in the first instance, to the genius of Willi Muenzenberg to open a channel to the non-Communist

~~RESTRICTED OFFICIALS ONLY~~

- 3 -

sympathizers "...through a series of organizations loosely connected with the party by common aims, but free from the same commitments to revolutionary action and from the same stringent requirements of doctrine and discipline." With the establishment in 1921 of the Workers' International Relief to help alleviate the famine in Russia, Muenzenberg set the pattern for the front organization and provided an organizational reference for the "fellow-traveller". By 1926, the Comintern functionary, O.V. Kuusinen was telling the Executive Committee:

"...The first part of our task is to build up not only communist organisations, but other organisations as well, above all mass organisations sympathising with our aims, and able to aid us for special purposes. We have already such organisations in some countries, for instance the International Red Aid, the Workers' International Relief, etc....

"Besides this we require a number of more or less firmly established organisatory /organizational/ fulcrums, which we can utilise for our further work, ensuring that we are not condemned to the Sisyphus-like task of only influencing the masses politically, only to see this mass influence constantly slip through our hands. We must create a whole solar system of organisations and smaller committees around the Communist Party, so to speak, smaller organisations working actually under the influence of our party (not under mechanical leadership)..."

While the Communist movement did not exactly create a "whole solar system" of special organizations, the endless lists of captured organizations testifies to some success in this venture during the interwar years.

II. POSTWAR DEVELOPMENTS

Although they had their counterparts in the interwar years, the contemporary international front organizations, are products of wartime unity which conditioned both their creation and development.¹ Once the

-
1. The more prominent Communist international front organizations are the World Peace Council, the World Federation of Trade Unions (including a number of trade union internationals organized on craft lines paralleling the non-Communist International Trade Secretariats), the World Federation of Democratic Youth, its "autonomous affiliate", the International Union of Students, the Women's International Democratic Federation, the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, the World Federation of Scientific Workers, the International Organization of Journalists, and the International Federation of Resistance Fighters.

- 4 -

quarantine on the Soviet Union had been lifted in the fight against the Axis, the road was paved for the USSR to construct a network of front organizations linking itself to professional, social and, economic groups in the West. Successful initially in creating international organizations including substantial non-Communist representation, the Kremlin soon saddled them with policy requirements which inevitably drove out the non-Communists and reduced the organizations -- with few exceptions -- to glorified paper mills, forms without substance, drums beating on the ears of a large, if captive audience.

Set up under Communist control, international front organizations were, at first, sufficiently tolerant to allow for divergent opinion. They split when it became clear beyond doubt that the organizations were exclusively devoted to support of Soviet political warfare against the West and of Communist military actions in Asia. In a number of cases, non-Communist contingents established their own groups, which have since been largely concerned with counter-propaganda against their respective parent organizations. The original international organization was reduced to a Communist rump, its support drawn largely from Communist countries.

The "fronts" have, however, retained a following and potential in the so-called underdeveloped areas. Communist attempts -- so far not too successful -- to establish specifically Asian youth, trade union, and student groups as a part of, if not in, the international Communist front setup, are illustrative of a continuing vitality in these areas.

All international front groups come under the foreign section of the CPSU's Central Committee, Soviet control is maintained through their representatives in the international front. The Soviet representatives usually hold key positions in the headquarters units where they

~~LIMITED OFFICIAL USE~~

~~LIMITED OFFICIAL USE~~

- 5 -

can give guidance on any question of particular interest to Moscow. National affiliates receive the party line through the official program adopted by the international front organization. Front group programs may also provide an additional channel through which individual Communist parties receive guidance as to tactics to be followed in the front group's sphere, i.e., labor, youth, etc.

III. THE WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

The postwar cycle of the international front organizations may be illustrated by the experience of the World Federation of Trade Unions, (WFTU), initially the most hopeful of like Communist ventures. The WFTU represented a unique opportunity for the Soviet Union to gain support of world labor for which it had unsuccessfully bid during the interwar years through the medium of the Red International of Trade Unions (Profintern). Set up as a subsidiary in 1921 by the Comintern in order to harness the trade union movement of the world around a new center in Moscow, the Profintern failed to make any important inroads into the western trade unions. Consequently, during the period of the popular front in the 1930's, the Profintern, unable to reach any agreement with the International Federation of Trade Unions, the so-called Amsterdam International, advised its affiliates to make such unity arrangements as they could with the Socialist Trade unions and dissolved itself in 1937.

In 1945, in collaboration with the British TUC, the American CIO and the French and Latin American unions, the Soviets succeeded in establishing the World Federation of Trade Unions. In the first years of its history, when the Communists were following a strategy of "united front from above," they made an attempt to force their majority on the non-Communist unions. They preferred to have the WFTU appear as a non-partisan labor organization, which would lend respectability and

~~LIMITED OFFICIAL USE~~

- 6 -

universality to their protests, their appeals, and their investigations. But as the issues were drawn between the US and the USSR, particularly over the Marshall Plan, cooperation of the Communist and non-Communist unions on a non-political basis became more difficult and on January 19, 1949, the British TUC, the American CIO and the Dutch Federation of Trade Unions walked out of the Executive Bureau meeting. By 1950 all the democratic affiliates of the WFTU had withdrawn.

Since the split, the WFTU has become an exclusively Communist controlled organization, carrying out the Communist line to the very last. The bulk of its claimed and doubtlessly exaggerated 84 million membership is drawn from the Communist orbit. For example, of its estimated 65,000,000 membership in 1953, 58,500,000 were drawn from Communist-governed countries, where the so-called trade unions are instruments of the government and in no sense subject to WFTU influence. Another 4,500,000 were in the Communist-dominated trade union federations of Italy and France, in whose affairs the WFTU also plays only a minor role. This left only 2,000,000 members in the entire non-Communist world, outside Italy and France, over two-thirds of them in Indonesia and India.

The WFTU in Asia. The split in the WFTU severely limited that organization's possibilities of expansion in Western Europe and North America. Consequently, the WFTU turned its attention to the so-called underdeveloped areas, which it recognized as offering a potentially fertile ground for the exploitation of discontented groups. In virtually all of these areas, trade unionism was extremely weak, and in many cases it existed only in opposition to the colonial administration, or to other local governments.

In the latter part of 1949, after British, American, and Dutch affiliates had withdrawn, the WFTU sponsored the Trade Union Conference

~~CONFIDENTIAL - USA~~

- 7 -

of the Asian and Australian Countries in Peiping. The proceedings of this conference made it clear that the WFTU intended to concentrate on the underdeveloped areas, and that the organization, far from having a primary concern with labor, existed to implement Moscow's general political action tactics.

The conference was used to proclaim that the Chinese Communist path to victory was to be the model for "colonial and semi-colonial" countries. In his keynote address to the Conference, Liu Shao-chi, the Chinese chairman, stated "The path taken by the Chinese people to defeat imperialism and its lackeys and to establish the People's Republic of China is the path that should be taken by the peoples of the various colonial and semi-colonial countries' in their fight for nation independence and people's democracy." The speech was promptly endorsed editorially by the Cominform Journal. A more realistic appraisal of the situation in most of the Asian countries, however, resulted in a shift of emphasis toward the current "united front" policy in 1951. Stress has continued to be placed on Asia, however, and the Third Congress in October 1953 recommenced the development of trade unions among agricultural and plantation workers in addition to the organization of industrial workers. The Congress also resolved to extend aid to unions in underdeveloped countries on an even larger scale in the future.

The Current Role of the WFTU. Given the fact that it is completely controlled by the Communists, with a membership that is overwhelmingly Communist, it is probably more accurate now to characterize the WFTU as an international Communist propaganda agency operating in the field of labor than as an international trade union organization.

As an organization bound by the interests of Soviet foreign policy, the WFTU is by definition debarred from representing the bread and butter interests of the working class. The WFTU's insistent appeals for unity

~~LIMITED OFFICIAL USE~~

- 8 -

of action with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the International Christian Federation of Trade Unions have fallen on deaf ears. The WFTU has been no more successful in weaning away individual affiliates of these Internationals, which is the basic purpose of the unity of action campaign.

Even the community of interest between the Soviet trade unions and the Communist trade unions outside the orbit is wholly artificial. WFTU-affiliated unions outside the orbit, whether Communist-dominated or not, generally use their control over the membership to challenge the government and employers. In the Soviet orbit, labor organizations are the government's guardians of labor discipline. Thus the basic functions as well as the basic interests of these different types of unions are diametrically opposed. These two divergent interests often clash when Soviet foreign policy compels the leaders of the Western Communist unions to subordinate the interests of their movements. The WFTU is therefore by the very terms of its organization unable to express the interests of its non-captive affiliates.

If, as has been argued, the WFTU's range has become as narrow as the Profintern's, what purpose does it serve? The answer would seem to lie more in the realm of political faith and organizational practice than in the WFTU's effectiveness in the field of labor. First of all, the WFTU serves as symbol of the solidarity of the working class, the instrument in Marxian theory, at least, historically destined to lead society to a higher stage. The fact that the industrial working class is not indispensable for the seizure of power and that the Communist revolutions that have occurred, have taken place where the proletariat was weak, does not negate the usefulness of the myth.

Secondly, the WFTU exists, and because it exists, it has a tendency to perpetuate itself on the basis of its perhaps useful, but not

~~CONFIDENTIAL - OFFICIAL USE~~

- 9 -

indispensable functions, such as the central dispenser of Communist policy on labor. It exists also because the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions exists.

Thirdly, the WFTU is a symbol held up to Soviet labor of foreign labor support to the workers in the Communist countries. As the activities of the WFTU are represented to him, the Soviet worker is persuaded that there is some substance to international solidarity in the capitalist countries as well as in the Communist orbit.

Fourthly, WFTU interest in the former colonial and dependent areas may produce some dividends. Invitations to international meetings, training of potential leaders and small grants of financial assistance are expressions of international solidarity that are welcomed in areas that have recently cast off western tutelage. In areas where trade unions are amorphous bodies, lacking in class consciousness, and supremely susceptible to manipulation from above, the WFTU may be able to accomplish a great deal with very little.

~~LIMITED OFFICIAL USE~~

- 10 -

IV. WORLD PEACE COUNCIL

By far the most spectacular contemporary international front organization is that directed by the World Peace Council, a product of the Partisans of Peace movement launched in 1949. In contrast to the other front organizations which appeal to specific interest groups, the World Peace Council purports to be "classless and non-partisan"; it tries to enlist the support of "all men of good will, regardless of race, nationality, political or religious connection." It has occupied a central position in Communist propaganda since 1949 when the Cominform designated the peace movement as the "...pivot of the entire activity of the Communist parties and democratic organizations."

In the peace movement the Communists had all the ingredients for a successful front action: a world torn by political warfare and revolution and threatened by the prospect of atomic devastation; the universal appeal of its "peace" slogan; and an approach to the people that was ostensibly free of political, racial or religious barriers.

Of all the campaigns mounted by the peace movement, the first -- the Stockholm Appeal to ban the A-bomb -- was the most spectacular. Subsequent signature campaigns modelled after the Stockholm appeal, the one for a Five Power Peace Pact and the so-called Vienna Appeal for a Five Power Conference and top-level negotiations, were pale and routine affairs by comparison.

The Stockholm Appeal, adopted at a meeting of the Partisans of Peace in Stockholm, March 15-19, 1950, demanded the absolute prohibition of the atomic bomb, which it defined as an aggressive weapon; asked that the government which first used the atomic bomb be treated as a war criminal; and finally demanded strict international control to insure that the ban was carried out. The strategy behind the Appeal was

~~ENTIRELY OFFICIAL COPY~~

- 11 -

simple: since the USSR was lagging in the field of atomic weapons, it was to USSR's advantage to create an atmosphere in which the use of the atomic bomb would be considered morally indefensible.

The campaign to secure public support for the Stockholm appeal had no precedent in intensity and magnitude in the postwar activities of international Communism. All the resources of the Communist movement and its front organizations were brought into play. The press, mass meetings, demonstrations, and house-to-house canvassing were all used.

What were the results?

The bulk of the claimed half-billion signatures to the Appeal came from the Communist countries. Nevertheless, an indeterminate number of non-Communists signed the Appeal, many doubtless attracted by the ostensible idealism of the Appeal without having given any thought to its uses for Soviet policy. The campaign presented the Communists with an opportunity to proselytize the population not only on behalf of the Soviet Union's peace policy but on the advantages of joining the Communist movement itself. The Partisans of Peace propaganda also sought to identify the US with the A-bomb and hence with an aggressive foreign policy. But whatever success the Stockholm campaign achieved, it was largely nullified by the Communist invasion of South Korea, shortly after the campaign got underway. The peace movement itself never seems to have recovered from the blow dealt it by the invasion; the movement was trapped, as it were, between professions and Soviet performance. Non-Communist opinion, official and otherwise, henceforth took a more active part in combatting the movement.

Since the Stockholm campaign the Communist peace movement has
and
tried to multiply its affiliates /increase its propaganda dissemination.
launched
It has/a number of campaigns and held innumerable meetings all with

~~RESTRICTED OFFICIAL USE~~

~~RESTRICTED OFFICIAL USE~~

- 12 -

progressively poorer results until its virtual eclipse in the shadow of Soviet diplomatic activity during 1955. It is difficult to trace any solid achievement to the peace movement or to detect any significant trend of public opinion or shift in policy on the part of any non-Communist government which may be attributed to the peace movement.

The ineffectiveness of the World Peace Council has led to suggestions by its most prominent Indian leader for its dissolution. Recent specifically Asian "peace" activities have not fared better. The Communist-sponsored "Asian Conference for the Relaxation of Tensions," held in New Delhi, April 6-10, 1955 was a disappointment to its sponsors and an embarrassment to the Indian Government. The Asian Solidarity Committee, which emerged from the conference as a new idea for rallying Asian support, has been little heard from.

V. CONCLUSION

The "thaw" induced by the 20th CPSU Congress, has set the international Communist front organizations to an examination of their role and performance. Dissolution has been suggested in the "peace" movement; reorganization and "transformation" has been the keynote in most of the others. All are troubled by a record of inadequacy in performing their essential function of mobilizing non-Communist support for Soviet foreign policy objectives. It is extremely doubtful that the "fronts" in their present form will be able to revitalize themselves.

Meanwhile, however, they go on disseminating their vast quantities of pro-Soviet propaganda, holding their meetings for the guidance of their affiliates, subsidizing attractive "unofficial" trips to Communist countries, and playing on anti-colonialist feelings, if not to win converts to Communism, at least to sow discord in the non-Communist world.

~~RESTRICTED OFFICIAL USE~~